



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grant Studies Farming With Native Beneficial Insects



Sheet mulching enhances soil health at Stonewall Farm, Keene.

The Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) program is a voluntary program intended to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. Under CIG, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds are used to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals, requiring a 50-50 match between the agency and the applicant.

CIG enables NRCS to work with other public and private entities to accelerate technology transfer

and adoption of promising technologies and approaches to address some of the nation's most pressing natural resource concerns. CIG will benefit agricultural producers by providing more options for environmental enhancement and compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations. The NRCS administers CIG.

The Xerces Society, partnering with the NH NRCS and the NH Association of Conservation Districts (NHACD), through a CIG, is designing and managing the installation of conservation biological control habitat features on farm sites to protect healthy habitats that provide foods, nests, and shelters for native beneficial insects that prey on crop pests. Nectar, pollen, prey, or foliage, undisturbed soil or hollow/pithy stems, and undisturbed shelter from conservation practices can support populations of biological control agents that consume crop pests, regulate balanced farm dynamics, and reduce or eliminate insecticide sprays. Jarrod Fowler of The Xerces Society is collaborating with New Hampshire farmers, the USDA NH NRCS, and the NHACD to get away from using pesticides with conservation biocontrol.



Insectary strips attract beneficial insects at Wingate Farm, Hinsdale.



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Today, six New Hampshire farms are preparing and installing healthy habitats. Conservation practices, including flowering field borders, hedgerows, insectary strips, cover crops, and beetle banks, are being planned and prepared with farming principles that empower diverse communities of native plants and insects to flourish. Regenerative and resourceful site-preparation practices that build and recycle soil fertility and water retention, such as green manuring, smother cropping, sheet mulching, hügelkultur, and solarization are currently being tested.



Soil solarization recycles used greenhouse films at Fresh Start Farms, Dunbarton.



This grant also seeks to increase awareness of beneficial insect biology through outreach and education. Conservation biocontrol talks and trainings for collaborators, NRCS-NH and NHACD staff, and volunteers have been given.

Next steps include: presenting a full-day Conservation Biocontrol short course at Stonewall Farm on September 20, 2016, sowing and transplanting wildflowers after successful site-preparation during 2016–2017, and recruiting additional farmer collaborators for 2017.

Hügelkultur mimics forest floor conditions at High Mowing School, Wilton.